

Citizen Working Group

In July of 2000, the Wyoming Sage-Grouse Working Group was formed to develop a statewide strategy for conservation of sage-grouse in Wyoming. After an organizational meeting June 21, 2000, potentially affected interests submitted names of potential representatives that would be acceptable to the interest groups. The working group was then selected and consisted of 18 Wyoming citizens from diverse backgrounds including agricultural, industrial, governmental, environmental, hunting, and Native American tribal interests.

Group Members Included:

Linda Baker, Pinedale; Larry Bourret, Laramie; Joel Bousman, Boulder; Tim Byer, Douglas; Tom Christiansen, Green River; Joe Evans, Cheyenne; Bill Gerhart, Cheyenne; Larry Hayden-Wing, Laramie; Larry Kmoch, Rawlins; Don Lamborn, Kemmerer; Bruce Lawson, Casper; John Marton, Buffalo; Tom Rinkes, Lander; Stacey Scott, Casper; Albert Sommers, Pinedale; Renee Taylor, Casper; Western Thayer, Ft. Washakie; and Mark Winland, Gillette. The facilitator was Bob Budd.

Many others participated in several meetings and their contributions to the planning efforts were significant. The group had numerous meetings, all open to the public and publicized via WGFD news releases and the WGFD website.

Glossary

Avoid. The term "avoid" in this document means that there is flexibility to allow an activity consistent with goals and objectives in this plan.

Crucial Habitat. Any particular seasonal range or habitat that has been documented as the determining factor in a population's ability to maintain and reproduce itself at a certain level over the long term.

Degraded Habitat. Habitat that is reduced in quality as a result of fragmentation, invasive plants, overgrazing/browsing, and/or shrub decadence or lack of understory due to advanced succession.

Drought. A prolonged chronic shortage of water, as compared to the norm, often associated with high temperatures and winds during spring, summer and fall or a period without precipitation during which the soil water content is reduced to such an extent that plants suffer from lack of water. (Society for Range Management)

Drought Operational Definition. Operational definitions help define the onset, severity and end of droughts. No single operational definition of drought works in all circumstances. There are four basic approaches to measuring drought: meteorological, hydrological, agricultural and socioeconomic. (National Drought Mitigation Center 1995)

Meteorological drought is usually an expression of precipitation's departure from normal over some period of time.

Agricultural (forage) drought occurs when there isn't enough soil moisture to meet the needs of a particular crop (including livestock production) at a particular time.

Hydrological drought refers to deficiencies in surface and subsurface water supplies. It is measured as stream flow, and as lake, reservoir and ground water levels.

Socioeconomic drought is what happens when physical water shortage starts to affect people, individually and collectively.

Forbs. Any broad-leaved herbaceous plant, other than grasses, sedges and rushes. These are generally flowering plants with tap roots, broad leaves, netlike veins, and solid non-joint stems.

Invasive Plants. A species that is 1) primarily non-native to the ecosystem under consideration and 2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

Landscape. The exact boundaries or scale of a landscape are established according to the objectives of a study or discussion. The area included may be as small as a pond or as large as several counties or states, but in all cases, ecologists recognize that energy, water, nutrients, and organisms move back and forth across whatever boundaries are established. (Knight 1994)

Lek. A traditional courtship display and breeding area attended by male sage-grouse in or adjacent to sagebrush-dominated habitat. Leks are annually defined as:

Active. Any lek that has been attended by male sage-grouse during the strutting season.

Inactive. Leks where it is known that there was no strutting activity through the course of a strutting season.

Unknown. Leks that have not been documented either active or inactive during the course of a strutting season.

Based on annual status a lek may be put into one of the following categories for management purposes:

Occupied Lek. A lek that has been active during at least one strutting season within the last ten years.

Historic Lek. A lek that has not been active during a consecutive ten-year period.

Undetermined Lek. Any lek that has not been documented as being active in the last ten years but does not have sufficient documentation to be designated historical.

Mosaic. A landscape composed of patches of discrete ecological sites and/or seral stages in a variety of sizes and shapes.

“Newcomer” Predator. Predators that did not occur or have expanded their range in Wyoming within recent times as the result of changes in management practices and other human activities (e.g. red fox, raccoon, etc.). “Newcomer” predators may also apply to native species such as ravens which have increased in number (as apposed to range) due to human activity.

Seral Stage. The relatively transitory communities that develop under plant succession generally described as early, mid, and late seral stages. The mix of seral or successional stages on the landscape can be the result of disturbances, topography and soil, climate, uses of the land, management prescriptions, vegetation classification categories, and evaluation procedures.

Site Potential. The potential plant community that a particular area (ecological site) is capable of producing as a climax plant community.

Small-grained. A habitat or vegetation type that occurs at a much smaller scale or resolution than the overall landscape.

State-and-transition model. The idea that rangeland vegetation exhibits multiple states and transitions among them. See Bestelmeyer et al., Journal of Range Management, 56:114-126, March 2003.

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Appendix 1

POPULATION MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT*

One of the primary components of an effective sage-grouse conservation strategy will be the continued development and utilization of a standardized population monitoring program capable of producing meaningful, rigorous status and trend information. This monitoring program should result in regular reports being generated by the WGFD that can be used by local planning groups to analyze local situations and implement local conservation plans. These data should also be suitable for aggregate analysis at the statewide level and comparison to similar data sets from other states. The Wyoming Sage-Grouse Database has recently been developed. This database incorporates lek survey and count data as well as harvest data, including determination of the age and sex from wings deposited in hunter collection barrels. As this database comes into use, it should provide the basis for both local and statewide analysis of sage-grouse population status and trend.

Breeding Populations

Sage-grouse gather on traditional display areas (leks) each spring, affording the opportunity for tracking breeding populations. Methods include lek censuses (annually counting the number of male sage-grouse attending leks in a given area), lek complex routes (annually counting the number of male sage-grouse on a group (complex) of leks that are relatively close and represent part or all of a single breeding population), and lek surveys (annually counting the number of active leks in a given area). All monitoring procedures are conducted during early morning (1/2 hour before to 1 hour after sunrise), with reasonably good weather (light or no wind, partly cloudy to clear) from early March to early May. Timing is dependent on elevation of leks and persistence of winter conditions. Sage-grouse will begin displaying in late February at lower elevations with milder climates and in years with mild winter weather. Lek attendance will persist into early or mid-May at higher elevations.

All lek data should be collected and reported as defined below.

Lek. A traditional courtship display area attended by male sage-grouse in or adjacent to sagebrush dominated habitat. Designation of the site as a lek requires observation of two or more male sage-grouse engaged in courtship displays. In addition new leks must be confirmed by a survey conducted during the appropriate time of day and during the strutting season. Observation of sign of strutting activity can also be used to confirm a suspected lek.

* - based on Sage Grouse Methodology Committee Report on Sage Grouse Management Practices to the 1996 Western States Sage Grouse Workshop - Gillette, Wyoming and Monitoring of Sage Grouse Habitats and Populations. Draft by J.W. Connelly, K.P. Reese and M.A. Schroeder, January 2002. Metric measures have been converted and rounded to English units for this appendix.

Lek Complex. A group of leks in close proximity between which male sage-grouse may be expected to interchange from one day to the next. A specific distance criteria does not yet exist.

Lek Count. A census technique that documents the actual number of male sage-grouse observed on a particular lek or complex of leks using the methods described below.

Lek Survey. A monitoring technique designed primarily to determine whether leks are active or inactive and obtaining accurate counts of the numbers of males attending is secondary.

Annual status – Each year a lek will be determined to be in one of the following status categories:

Active. Any lek that has been attended by male sage-grouse during the strutting season. Presence can be documented by observation of birds using the site or by signs of strutting activity.

Inactive. Leks where it is known that there was no strutting activity through the course of a strutting season. A single visit, or even several visits, without strutting grouse being seen is not adequate documentation to designate a lek as inactive. This designation requires either an absence of birds on the lek during multiple ground visits under ideal conditions throughout the strutting season or a ground check of the exact lek site late in the strutting season that fails to find any sign (droppings/feathers) of strutting activity.

Unknown. Leks that have not been documented either active or inactive during the course of a strutting season.

Based on annual status a lek may be put into one of the following categories for management purposes:

Occupied Lek. A lek that has been active during at least one strutting season within the last ten years. Management protection will be afforded to occupied leks.

Historical Lek. A lek that has not been active during a consecutive ten-year period. A historic lek is one that has been surveyed or counted without male grouse or signs of strutting activity being observed in at least six strutting seasons spanning ten years. In addition the lek must be confirmed as inactive at least two of those ten years. A lek may also be designated as historic if the lek site and the adjoining sagebrush habitat have been destroyed (e.g. type conversion). Management protection will not be afforded to historical leks.

Undetermined Lek. Any lek that has not been documented as being active in the last ten years but does not have sufficient documentation to be designated historical. Management protection will be afforded to undetermined leks until their status has been documented as historical.

Locating Leks--Before a monitoring program for sage-grouse breeding populations can be designed, lek locations must be documented. Leks can be located by searching from the ground or air from early March to early May.

Helicopters or fixed-wing airplanes can be used for air searches. Strutting cocks are highly visible as the early morning sun shines on their white chests. Suspected breeding habitat should be flown on north - south transects with lines about ½ mile apart. Aerial searches are biased toward finding larger leks; small leks (<15 birds) are more difficult to detect. Calm, clear mornings are prerequisite to aerial searches. Winds over 15 mph and more than scattered cloud cover should be sufficient to cancel search flights. Cocks can be observed from the air at distances greater than a ½ mile in early morning sun, but cloud cover greatly reduces observability. Under conditions of marginal light, transect width should be narrowed. High winds not only make traveling a straight transect difficult, but also affect strutting behavior. Fewer cocks will strut continuously, and flushing distance appears to be greater under windy conditions.

Transects should be flown at about 300 feet above ground level. Whenever possible, two observers should be used in addition to the pilot so that one observer is always looking away from the sun regardless of the direction the aircraft is flying. Searches should begin at the east edge of the survey area and work west to minimize the possibility of the plane flying over leks prior to them being observed. Special attention should be paid to old lakebeds, stock-watering areas, and other relatively open sites largely surrounded by sagebrush with 15 to 25% canopy cover. Lek searches from an aircraft should be conducted from ½ hour before to one hour after sunrise, although during peak attendance the time can be stretched to 1½ hours after sunrise.

Cock behavior in response to approaching aircraft varies, but may affect search success. Strutting may continue as the plane approaches and flies near or over the lek, but in other instances, grouse have been observed squatting similar to that seen when an avian predator approaches. Sage-grouse virtually disappear when they squat, making it essential to locate cocks prior to close approach or fly over by the aircraft. Observers should continually strive to observe strutting cocks at a distance. Research has found that aerial count estimates can be up to a third less than ground counts. Therefore aerial counts are not usually considered adequate for monitoring trends in lek attendance, although efforts have been made in Nevada to develop a counting technique using helicopters.

In areas with no recent history of sage-grouse use or poor habitat, aircraft speed can be increased and search intervals increased to 1 mile. In areas where habitat alteration or human development is anticipated, narrower transect widths may be advisable to better ensure that the area is thoroughly searched.

Lek searches can be conducted from the ground by driving along roads in suspected or known breeding habitat and stopping every ½ mile to listen for sounds of breeding grouse. Ground searches can be started an hour before sunrise. In less accessible areas, searches can be made from a mountain bike, trail motorcycle, 4-wheel all terrain

vehicle, horseback or on foot. On a calm morning, breeding sage-grouse may be heard at a distance of almost 1 mile. All openings or areas of less dense sagebrush should be searched for breeding birds with binoculars or a spotting scope.

A variation of the ground survey can be used following snowfall during the night or early morning. Although lek activity is minimal during stormy weather and the birds may flush at the first sign of an intruder, some male sage-grouse will attend leks on virtually every morning during the spring, regardless of weather. Areas that are suspected of being leks can be searched immediately following a snowfall. If grouse use the area, tracks will be evident in the snow, and the number of tracks may give some indication of the relative size of the lek. Similarly, new leks can be located by the discovery of concentrated tracks/droppings/feathers at all times of the day when conducting other field activities (big game winter mortality transects). Return visits to such sites during the morning strutting hours must be made to confirm the location as a lek.

Not every site where sage-grouse are seen to strut is a strutting ground. Grouse that have been flushed from their lek will often resume strutting in a different site for the rest of that morning, and then return to the normal lek the following night. Juvenile cocks will sometimes pursue hens as they leave a lek, strutting as a group as far away as ½ mile from the lek as they follow the females. Care needs to be taken that a site identified as a strutting ground is truly a lek. Strutting activity should be documented at a site on at least two mornings before it is designated as a lek. Ground survey of the site to search for sign of prolonged activity can also separate true leks from temporary strutting sites.

The center point of all leks should be recorded in UTM's using NAD83 datum and stored within the Wyoming Sage-Grouse Database. Additionally, it is advisable to record/map the perimeters of all leks.

Lek Counts--Lek counts are a common means of monitoring sage-grouse populations. Lek counts document the actual number of male sage-grouse observed on a particular lek or complex of leks. A lek complex is a group of leks in close proximity between which male sage-grouse may be expected to interchange.

Although lek counts are widely used, concern over their usefulness has been expressed. However, techniques for correctly conducting lek counts have been described herein and problems generally seem to be related to disregarding accepted techniques. Reviews of raw data recorded while conducting lek routes have indicated that some leks have been counted at the wrong time of the year or during periods of wind or precipitation. All participants in lek counts should receive adequate training in the proper techniques. Video training guides (Power Point format) are available.

The following criteria should be used to insure the quality and utility of the count data:

- 1) Lek counts should be conducted every 7-10 days over a 3-4 week period following the peak of mating activity. Peak breeding usually occurs in early April in Wyoming, however peak male attendance usually occurs in late April or early May when yearling males show increased lek attendance rates.

- 2) Counts should only be conducted from the ground.
- 3) Counts should be made between ½ hour before to 1 hour after sunrise.
- 4) Counts should be conducted a minimum of three times each year for each lek.
- 5) Counts should only be conducted if wind speeds are less than 5 mph and there is no precipitation occurring.

Subdominant males are often less active than more dominant males occupying the center of the lek. These subdominant birds may be easily missed with a single count. A lek may be effectively counted in the following manner:

- 1) Locate a spot that provides good visibility of the entire lek. If the lek is very large (100 or more birds) it may be necessary to select two or more vantage points. Be careful not to get so close that an observer's presence disturbs the grouse.
- 2) Record the time that the lek count begins.
- 3) Count the birds from left to right (or vice versa).
- 4) Wait one to two minutes, then count from right to left.
- 5) Wait one to two minutes, then again count from left to right.
- 6) Record the highest number of males and females separately, and then move to the next lek.

Because some sage-grouse may use several leks in a given breeding season, changes in lek attendance observed during a lek count may be due to some birds shifting to nearby leks. Moreover, a single lek could disappear because of disturbance or vegetation change. The disappearance may or may not mean that the actual population is declining. Therefore, all leks within a complex should be counted during a lek census to access actual changes in the grouse population.

A lek complex route is a type of lek count with an important distinction—an attempt is made to census a group of leks that are relatively close and represent part or all of a single breeding population. Leks should be counted along routes to facilitate repetition by other observers, increase the likelihood of recording satellite leks, and account for shifts in breeding birds if they occur. Lek complex count routes should be established so that all leks along the route can be counted within 1.5 hours. If weather degenerates after a lek complex route has begun, the route should be run again.

If a lek is not occupied (and it had been in previous weeks or years), the observer should leave his/her vehicle and (with the engine off) listen for sounds of displaying grouse. Leks will move if birds are subject to continuing disturbance. Grouse may also be flushed from a lek by a predator and, if it is still reasonably early in the morning, may display nearby once the predator leaves the area.

Before establishing lek counts/routes in a given area, some thought should be given to personnel available for conducting routes. It is much better to have a few counts with high quality data than many with less than adequate data. Lek count routes should be coordinated through and assigned by the WGFD, although trained persons from outside the agency might collect lek count data. Those leks with a long history of consistent data collection are highly recommended to be included in count routes. A minimum of

one lek count route should be conducted in each management area occupied by sage-grouse.

Lek count data should be recorded on the standardized statewide reporting form and recorded in the Wyoming Sage-Grouse Database.

Lek Surveys— Ideally, all sage-grouse leks would be count leks. However, some sage-grouse breeding habitat is inaccessible during spring because of mud and snow, or so remote that leks cannot be routinely counted. Other leks may be situated in topography or vegetation that does not allow an accurate count of males from any vantage point. In addition, time and budget constraints limit the number of leks that can be visited. In these cases, lek surveys are the only reliable means of monitoring these populations. Lek surveys are designed primarily to determine whether leks are active or inactive. Only one visit to the lek is required and obtaining accurate counts of the numbers of males attending is secondary. Surveys require less manpower and time than lek counts. They can also be conducted from fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter. Because obtaining a peak male count is not a priority, surveys of leks not on count routes can begin with initiation of strutting in early March and extend into early-mid May, depending on the site and spring weather.

The major drawback to this technique is that it is not sensitive to a change in sage-grouse population size unless the sample size of leks is very large. As an example, a group of 5 leks could have had 50 males observed during one spring survey and 75 males observed two years later. These results should only be interpreted to mean that all 5 leks were active each year surveyed. What appears to be a 50% increase may not be the case. However, on a very large scale, Wyoming lek survey data have been shown to be consistent with lek count data population trends (up, down, stable).

To provide the most useful information on population trends, lek surveys should be conducted in the same manner and during the same time period each year. In other words, they should not be conducted from a fixed-wing aircraft one year and a helicopter the next year or in early March one year and in May the next. The date and time should be recorded for each survey. UTM coordinates for each lek encountered should also be noted, as well as any other information that observers might consider important. Although it is difficult to get an accurate count of birds from an aircraft, it is usually possible to estimate the number of birds present.

The activity status of leks whose exact location is known can be checked at any time of the day, and for a short period after the strutting season, by looking for signs of strutting activity. Sites used by sage-grouse for strutting are easily identified by heavy concentrations of scattered fecal pellets (not in discrete piles beside sagebrush, as is common on winter ranges), feathers, tracks and trampled vegetation. Strutting sites are usually marked by large numbers of caecal droppings (miniature black "cow pies"). Caecal droppings are initially green, but cure to black quickly in the sun. Presence of green caecal droppings and fresh tracks can be used to determine if a lek site was active that morning. Sage-grouse fecal droppings can last for years, although fading with time, but caecal droppings usually decay within days or weeks, depending on

precipitation, limiting the time that this sign can be used to document lek activity. Ground visits to the exact strutting center of a lek also provides an ideal opportunity to get the lek location accurately and precisely mapped, using either GPS technology or orthophoto quad maps.

As with lek counts, the ideal time for lek surveys is from about 1/2 hour before until 1 hour after sunrise, but sage-grouse will occasionally strut as late as two hours or more after sunrise. Late attendance on leks usually coincides with either 1) presence of hens on the lek, 2) overcast skies, fog, or light snowfall with dim light, or 3) during the small, or "new" phases of the moon, when little strutting activity occurs at night. Males will generally cease strutting activity early on mornings when hens are absent (late in the strutting season) or near the full moon, when much of the strutting and breeding occurs at night. At and near the full moon, sage-grouse may strut all night and males will occasionally initiate strutting at sunset or shortly after sunset. At these times, leks can occasionally be checked in the evening. While not providing a count of attendance, lek surveys can and have been conducted at night during the full moon, provided leks can be approached close enough to either hear or spotlight strutting grouse.

The frequency with which known leks are surveyed is based on manpower, budgets and rates of habitat alteration or development. Remote leks should be surveyed at least once every three years and others more frequently. Increasing public interest in sage-grouse has afforded the opportunity to utilize volunteers to survey or count leks and thus increase data collection efforts. The Wyoming Wildlife Federation's "Adopt-a-Lek" program has shown to provide a pool of reliable volunteers. Volunteers should be properly trained in monitoring techniques to ensure quality data and not disrupt breeding activity.

Data Analysis-- Prior to analysis, field data should be reviewed to ensure that information was collected properly. Lek count routes conducted during stormy weather, high winds or late in the morning (i.e., routes completed more than 1.5 hours after sunrise) should not be included in the analysis.

To assess breeding population trends, the minimum amount of information needed is a record of the number of active leks in a given area over a period of years. This information can be obtained from lek surveys and lek routes, but these data will only reflect gross changes in the population and may provide misleading results.

Lek count data that have been correctly collected provide more useful data for assessing population trends than information on the number of active leks. Lek counts provide the following data: active leks/route; average number of males/route or complex; maximum number of males/route or complex; average number males/lek; maximum number of males/lek; and possibly, males/area (all males counted on a group of lek routes). Sometimes the number of leks along a route changes because the route has changed, the habitat has changed or satellite leks have developed. If this occurs, then the most effective means of tracking populations and analyzing changes will be by examining the number of males per lek. If the number of leks does not change over a

period of years, the number of males per route should form the basis of breeding population assessment.

Females are usually counted along lek routes, but because of their secretive nature and cryptic appearance they are difficult to detect. Although the number of females counted may provide some information on peak of breeding, these data should not be used to assess population change.

The development of the Wyoming Sage-Grouse Database and Job Completion Report has facilitated data storage, retrieval, analysis and reporting on both regional and statewide levels. All current and historical data should be entered into the database.

Production

Brood observations, brood routes and wing surveys have been used to assess sage-grouse production. Brood observations, sometimes called random brood routes, are simply records of all sage-grouse broods observed in a given area by any field personnel that find themselves in that area. This information provides some idea of the juvenile to adult ratio and percent of hens observed with broods. Thus, it is somewhat better than anecdotal data. However, it is not easily replicated and comparisons among years can be difficult to interpret.

Routes are usually conducted on foot, horseback or driven at speeds <20 mph in the morning (sunrise to about 0900) and evening (1800 to sunset) during late June, July and early August. Brood routes are normally established in areas known to have concentrations of sage-grouse. These areas are often in or adjacent to wet meadows, riparian zones and agricultural fields. Each brood is recorded separately and the presence of a hen is also recorded. Groups of unsuccessful females and males are also normally tallied. Because chicks are quite secretive it is usually necessary to flush the brood to obtain an accurate count. A trained bird dog can increase the efficiency of this procedure. If sufficient numbers of grouse are observed such that the sample size is adequate, this technique can provide a reliable indication of trends in production. Brood routes provide the following information: birds/km, broods/km, average brood size, and chick to adult hen ratio. For non-hunted populations or populations subject to very light hunting where relatively few wings can be collected, brood routes are the only method available for assessing production, short of using radio telemetry.

Sage-grouse wings collected during hunting seasons can be used to determine age and gender of harvested birds. For hunted populations, wing surveys are the most useful technique for assessing sage-grouse production (chicks/hen). However, sample sizes should exceed 150 wings, and could be considerably larger depending on the size of the area and population being sampled. Wings are normally collected at wing barrels or hunter check stations. The Wyoming Game & Fish Department's Sage-Grouse Sex and Age Guide should be used to determine age and gender of wings. Wings are usually read at an annual "wing-bee" held in November of each year. The wing-bee format allows for experience and expertise to be shared between participants.

Wing analyses and brood routes allow an assessment of trends in production and a comparison of production among areas. However, these data may not reflect population trends. For example, a portion of a population's winter habitat may be lost but the breeding range could remain intact. Production (juvenile to adult ratio) may be stable but the overall population may decline because of increased mortality on winter range. Thus, it is best to use this information in conjunction with data on breeding populations to make inferences on population trends.

Wing data should be entered into the Wyoming Sage-Grouse Database.

Winter Populations

Unlike breeding populations and production, there are no widely accepted methods for assessing winter populations. In part, this is because birds may be spread out over large areas during mild winters but concentrated in a relatively small proportion of the area in severe winters.

Probable winter use areas can be searched by 4-wheel drive vehicle, snowmobile, or on foot to document sage-grouse winter habitat. Aerial surveys using either a fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter may also be effective in identifying sage-grouse winter habitats and can often be done in conjunction with surveys for other wildlife (e.g. elk trend counts/classifications). Data collected should include at least approximate flock size and location. In addition, cover type (including sagebrush species present), topography, and snow depth data are also valuable but may not be possible to obtain from the aerial observations. Data should be acquired over a series of years with different snow conditions to give a more complete picture of winter grouse distribution.

Falconers can be a good source of winter distribution information and many have volunteered to collect and record winter locations.

Appendix 2

Nesting and Early Brood-rearing Habitat Methods and Descriptions

Vegetation variables were measured at nest sites, early brood-rearing habitat, and independent random locations at five study sites in Wyoming from 1994-2002.

Female sage-grouse were captured on and near leks from mid-March through April, 1994-2002 by spot-lighting and hoop-netting. Each captured hen was aged [yearling (<2 years old) or adult (≥ 2 years old)] based on the shape of the outermost wing primaries and fitted with a radio transmitter package secured with a PVC-covered wire necklace and situated on the breast.

Radio-marked sage-grouse hens were monitored bi-weekly through the pre-laying (April) and nesting (May-June) periods using hand-held receivers and 3-element Yagi antennas. Nest locations of radio-marked hens were determined by circling the bird until they could be observed. Rubber boots were worn while confirming nest locations to reduce human scent, and incubating hens were monitored after nest identification from a distance of ≥ 60 meters to minimize the chance of human-induced nest predation or nest abandonment.

Nests were examined to determine fate (successful or unsuccessful) when long-range monitoring indicated a hen had left the nest area. Nests were considered successful if ≥ 1 egg hatched, determined by the presence of a detached shell membrane.

Vegetation was evaluated between late May and early June at nest sites and independent random locations. To minimize differences resulting from herbaceous growth, vegetation was evaluated at successful nests, unsuccessful nests, and random plots concurrently following the first successful hatch. Standardized data collection protocol was used among the responsible individuals to reduce bias in measuring vegetative characteristics. The location of independent random sites was determined by randomly generating UTM coordinates for the study area. To ensure that random locations adequately represented available nesting habitat, the closest sagebrush plant taller than 35 centimeters (to the randomly generated point) was used as the center for the random plot.

Vegetation was evaluated along two perpendicular 30-meter transects intersecting the nest or random plot center. The orientation of the first transect was randomly determined. The line-intercept method was used to estimate the percent live sagebrush, dead sagebrush (<15% of the plant composed of living stems as determined by the presence of leaves), and total shrub canopy coverage. Dead sagebrush canopy cover was converted to a ratio of total sagebrush canopy cover. To estimate live sagebrush height, the maximum height (cm; excluding flowering stalks) of each intercepted sagebrush plant was recorded. Sagebrush density (plants/meter²) was estimated by counting the number of sagebrush plants in a 1-meter wide belt along each transect ($\geq 50\%$ of a plant had to be within the belt to be counted).

Vegetation characteristics were measured within a 20 × 50 centimeter quadrat using a canopy-coverage method at the transect intersection (nest), at 1.0 meter, and at 2.5 meter from the intersection along each 15 meter portion of the 30 meter transect radiating from the nest or random center. Herbaceous variables were assumed to represent nest screening elements, and thus were measured relatively close (≤ 2.5 meter) to the nest to ensure a potential direct influence on nest fate. Herbaceous variables measured included maximum droop height (the highest naturally growing portion of the plant excluding flowering stalks) of grasses, total herbaceous cover, standing grass cover, and forb cover [which included the shrub species winterfat (*Eurotia lanata*) and fringed sagewort (*Artemisia frigida*)]. Grass species were grouped and classified as either new or residual (i.e. standing-dead). Because forbs are important food components of female sage-grouse diets, species were identified and further grouped as either food forbs or non-food forbs according to previous research. Food forb cover was converted to a ratio of total forb cover and examined, thereby providing a measure of relative food forb abundance at the nest site. It should be noted, however, that nearly all forbs are potential food for sage-grouse depending on succulence and stage of growth.

Table 1 depicts vegetation variables collected at nest sites from five studies in Wyoming from 1994 to 2002. Some vegetation variables were not collected at all studies.

To identify early-brood-rearing habitat successful hens were located twice during early brood-rearing stages. The first location was identified at least two weeks following hatch to ensure broods had reached brooding habitat, and allow the hen to become firmly attached to her chicks prior to human disturbance. To ensure that feeding sites were identified, broods were located between sunrise and 8:00 am.

Vegetation measurements were recorded at early brood-rearing habitat and independent random sites in June and July. Independent random sites were determined by randomly generating UTM coordinates for the study area. Vegetation was measured utilizing the same methodology that was used for nesting habitat. Table 2 depicts vegetation variables of early brood-rearing habitats at five study sites in Wyoming from 1994 to 2002, and are directly comparable due to the similarities in data collection protocol.

Tables 3 through 8 show monthly and annual precipitation that was collected at National Weather Service (NWS) collection sites near each study area. These tables also show long term monthly and yearly averages and the number of years that the data was collected for each site. The Pinedale and Big Piney weather stations were used in conjunction with the Pinedale sage-grouse study due to lack of data capture during some periods at the Pinedale location. These data are available on the Western Regional Climate Center web site (<http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/>).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for nesting habitat variables qualified by sage-grouse nest and random plots in Wyoming, 1994-2002. T-tests were used to identify the differences between nest use vegetation plots vs. independent random vegetation plots. Bolded variables are significantly different. $\alpha = \leq 0.05$ Values in parentheses are standard deviations.

Variable	Farson		Rawlins		Bates Hole		Pinedale		Kemmerer ¹	
	NEST mean	RANDOM mean	NEST mean	RANDOM mean	NEST mean	RANDOM mean	NEST mean	RANDOM mean	NEST mean	RANDOM mean
Sample Size	82	90	42	61	87	87	50	63	64	77
Live Sagebrush Density (plants/m ²)	1.85(0.67)	1.54(0.60)	1.92(1.28)	1.60(1.00)	2.51(1.38)	2.43(1.29)	2.04(0.594)	2.38(0.63)		
Dead Sagebrush Density (plants/m ²)	0.37(0.20)	0.30(0.25)	0.31(0.18)	0.22(0.17)	0.294(0.15)	0.284(0.15)	0.33(0.190)	0.34(0.165)		
Vertical Obstruction Cover (cm)	26.80(11.78)	25.00(11.38)	47.00(20.09)	45.30(13.28)	0.396(0.18)	0.373(0.13)	N/A	N/A		
Total Shrub Canopy Cover (%)	29.60(7.74)	24.70(10.15)	28.60(12.83)	23.80(10.31)	30.50(11.70)	28.60(10.40)	38.1(11.60)	35.19(7.61)	28.4(11.33)	23.5(10.96)
Live Sagebrush Canopy Cover (%)	24.40(6.59)	19.80(8.79)	19.00(12.90)	16.60(9.92)	25.40(10.50)	23.89(9.46)	25.61(9.91)	26.96(5.83)	22.2(11.65)	18.6(9.29)
Dead Sagebrush Canopy Cover (%)	3.28(2.32)	2.46(2.73)	3.10(3.05)	2.10(2.11)	3.14(1.82)	2.77(1.57)	6.78(4.22)	4.95(3.39)		
Average Live Sagebrush Height (cm)	28.70(7.74)	26.60(10.44)	32.60(12.96)	27.40(11.87)	31.40(12.40)	30.70(10.20)	32.7(11.50)	27.63(5.62)	44.0(16.15)	35.9(17.53)
Residual Grass Height (cm)	7.94(4.29)	7.11(4.08)	10.60(4.41)	7.80(3.36)	11.73(3.00)	11.48(2.75)	11.46(3.71)	10.25(3.50)		
Residual Grass Cover (%)	2.33(2.93)	1.49(1.49)	1.03(1.88)	0.44(0.85)	2.45(1.55)	2.46(1.96)	4.11(4.39)	2.66(0.641)		
Live Grass Height (cm)	14.90(3.37)	13.40(3.43)	16.60(3.56)	15.00(3.36)	18.40(3.73)	17.73(3.95)	21.33(4.25)	21.79(3.59)		
Live Grass Cover (%)	8.86(5.69)	6.67(4.69)	8.20(4.73)	6.90(4.61)	4.59(2.61)	4.87(3.62)	10.6(11.7)	5.44(3.76)		
Total Forb Cover (%)	2.31(3.22)	3.27(4.15)	2.04(2.33)	2.11(3.05)	7.34(3.64)	7.18(3.90)	8.19(9.21)	4.33(4.75)	7.9(6.88)	5.4(5.61)
Food Forb Cover (%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.79(1.47)	1.90(1.57)	N/A	N/A		
Non-Food Forb Cover (%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.55(3.26)	5.28(3.24)	N/A	N/A		
Litter Cover (%)	10.61(5.86)	7.95(5.95)	26.10(17.02)	18.80(12.57)	8.54(3.34)	8.86(3.41)	20.4(12.2)	20(6.97)	28.3(16.00)	21.7(16.00)
Bare Ground Cover (%)	31.90(16.21)	35.66(16.70)	23.50(14.58)	35.10(13.82)	5.01(5.63)	4.52(4.38)	28.2(16.9)	39.6(12.0)	19.1(13.67)	27.1(20.19)
Lichen Cover (%)	1.14(2.30)	0.88(1.49)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Mat-former Cover (%)	N/A	N/A	0.07(0.20)	0.11(0.39)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Total Herbaceous Cover (%)	21.20(11.95)	17.57(10.34)	12.70(7.53)	10.20(6.56)	29.60(13.70)	31.90(16.20)	18.5(20.1)	9.07(6.41)	26.2(12.24)	22.3(13.55)
Nest Bush Height	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	44.4(24.1)	21.4(22.5)		

¹ Progress Report Data (Preliminary). No significance tests were performed for progress reports.

Means and standard deviations for early brood-rearing habitat variables qualified by sage-grouse early use and random plots in Wyoming, 1994-2002. T-tests were used to identify the differences between early brood use vegetation plots vs. independent random vegetation plots. Bolded variables are significantly different. $\alpha = 0.05$ Values in parentheses are standard deviations.

Variable	Farson		Rawlins		Bates Hole		Pinedale		Kemmerer	
	USE mean	RANDOM mean	USE mean	RANDOM mean	USE mean	RANDOM mean	USE mean	RANDOM mean	USE mean	RANDOM mean
Sample Size (n)	78	53	16	30	67	160	23	63	13	77
Live Sagebrush Density (plants/m ²)	1.80(0.640)	1.720(0.638)	1.76(1.160)	1.70(1.260)	2.15(1.35)	2.37(1.20)	1.9(0.521)	2.3(0.630)		
Dead Sagebrush Density (plants/m ²)	0.290(0.180)	0.219(0.118)	0.29(0.240)	0.19(0.110)	0.312(0.24)	0.279(0.19)	0.33(1.60)	0.35(0.165)		
Effective Vegetation Height (cm)	N/A	N/A	36.5(23.60)	41.3(12.050)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Total Shrub Canopy Cover (%)	21.60(7.780)	22.26(8.860)	23.5(11.200)	24.6(8.764)	19.29(9.93)	24.07(8.62)	30.06(6.30)	35.0(7.61)		
Live Sagebrush Canopy Cover (%)	17.22(6.920)	17.89(8.350)	14.4(8.800)	17.3(10.407)	15.83(8.67)	20.21(8.17)	21.5(7.35)	27.0(5.83)	13.5(13.4)	18.6(9.29)
Dead Sagebrush Canopy Cover (%)	1.95(1.730)	1.92(2.680)	2.7(2.760)	2.1(2.136)	2.15(2.02)	2.32(1.57)	4.3(3.01)	4.9(3.39)		
Average Live Sagebrush Height (cm)	27.89(13.090)	25.89(9.730)	33.4(12.000)	26.2(12.598)	25.46(10.24)	26.68(7.82)	29.5(8.83)	27.6(5.62)		
Visual obstruction	0.18(0.070)	0.18(0.070)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Residual Grass Height (cm)	N/A	N/A	6.6(3.880)	8.4(3.505)	11.1(2.64)	10.90(2.51)	11.3(5.79)	10.3(3.50)		
Residual Grass Cover (%)	N/A	N/A	0.100(0.240)	33(0.548)	2.85(1.88)	2.01(1.18)	3.5(3.90)	2.7(0.641)		
Live Grass Height (cm)	N/A	N/A	16.1(4.800)	14.4(2.739)	18.59(4.94)	17.84(3.72)	23.3(4.9)	21.7(3.59)		
Live Grass Cover (%)	6.77(4.280)	6.58(4.440)	12.5(13.200)	5.5(3.286)	5.89(5.74)	4.61(2.44)	14.2(18.1)	5.4(3.76)		
Total Forb Cover (%)	4.07(4.370)	3.22(3.470)	2.8(2.800)	1.6(1.643)	9.25(4.93)	6.59(3.33)	8.3(9.91)	4.3(4.75)		
Food Forb Cover (%)	0.46(0.890)	0.31(0.780)	N/A	N/A	3.55(4.34)	1.94(1.57)	N/A	N/A		
Non-Food Forb Cover (%)	3.61(4.190)	2.90(3.500)	N/A	N/A	5.70(2.91)	4.65(2.76)	N/A	N/A		
Litter Cover (%)	8.57(7.120)	7.94(6.340)	24.7(16.800)	20.7(14.788)	8.52(2.88)	10.12(3.70)	13.8(7.25)	20(6.97)		
Bare Ground Cover (%)	36.70(15.080)	33.87(17.210)	17.4(9.00)	37.6(5.60)	7.30(4.90)	7.62(7.82)	23.5(17.8)	39.6(12.00)		
Mat-former Cover (%)	N/A	N/A	0.41(6.00)	0.10(5.48)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Total Herbaceous Cover (%)	15.48(9.720)	15.86(10.220)	16.9(16.800)	7.8(4.930)	37.25(15.0)	29.36(14.45)	24.8(23.9)	9.07(6.41)		

² Progress Report Data (Preliminary). No significance tests performed.

Table 3**FARSON, WYOMING**

Monthly Total Precipitation (inches)

(483170)

a = 1 day missing, b = 2 days missing, c = 3 days, .etc.,

z = 26 or more days missing, A = Accumulations present

Long-term means based on columns; thus, the monthly row may not sum (or average) to the long-term annual value.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF MISSING DAYS : 5

Individual Months not used for annual or monthly statistics if more than 5 days are missing.

Individual Years not used for annual statistics if any month in that year has more than 5 days missing.

Year(s)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	ANN
1993	0.38	0.27	0.30	0.00z	1.56b	2.50c	1.80e	0.84d	0.15	0.51b	0.74b	0.20	9.25
1994	0.17a	0.61	0.57	0.00z	0.25	0.15	0.10	0.60	0.46	1.11d	0.44a	0.15	4.61
1995	0.50	0.54	0.83a	1.52a	4.03a	1.17b	0.88b	0.72	0.74	0.10	0.15	0.30	11.48
1996	0.16g	0.24	0.34	0.00	1.61c	0.79	0.62	0.00	1.18a	1.32b	0.00z	0.00z	6.10
MEAN	0.39	0.38	0.46	0.71	1.05	0.94	0.67	0.66	0.72	0.66	0.38	0.33	7.73
S.D.	0.34	0.33	0.40	0.56	0.90	0.88	0.77	0.66	0.68	0.57	0.32	0.27	2.38
No. YRS	72	77	77	76	75	74	68	73	69	73	71	71	49

Table 4
RAWLINS FAA AIRPORT, WYOMING
Monthly Total Precipitation (inches)
(487533)

a = 1 day missing, b = 2 days missing, c = 3 days, ..etc.,,

z = 26 or more days missing, A = Accumulations present

Long-term means based on columns; thus, the monthly row may not
sum (or average) to the long-term annual value.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF MISSING DAYS : 5

Individual Months not used for annual or monthly statistics if more than 5 days are missing.

Individual Years not used for annual statistics if any month in that year has more than 5 days missing.

YEAR(S)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	ANN
1995	0.39	0.38	0.32	1.23	4.12a	2.19	0.26a	0.55	0.85	0.60	0.44	0.48	11.81
1996	0.71	0.08	0.76	1.64	3.14	0.36	0.56	0.19	0.52	0.54	0.74	1.10	10.34
1997	0.65	0.39	0.24	1.11	1.13	1.62	0.21	1.62	1.22	0.38	0.27	0.38	9.22
MEAN	0.49	0.53	0.68	1.05	1.33	0.91	0.76	0.75	0.80	0.82	0.58	0.48	9.28
S.D.	0.33	0.38	0.41	0.62	0.88	0.67	0.59	0.52	0.65	0.69	0.40	0.33	1.89
No. YRS	51	50	50	51	51	51	51	50	51	51	52	52	49

Table 5
Bates Creek 2, WYOMING
Monthly Total Precipitation (inches)
(480552)

a = 1 day missing, b = 2 days missing, c = 3 days, ..etc.,

z = 26 or more days missing, A = Accumulations present

Long-term means based on columns; thus, the monthly row may not
sum (or average) to the long-term annual value.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF MISSING DAYS : 5

Individual Months not used for annual or monthly statistics if more than 5 days are missing.

Individual Years not used for annual statistics if any month in that year has more than 5 days missing.

YEAR(S)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	ANN
1996	0.66	0.14a	0.43	2.93	2.00	0.80	1.03	0.58	0.59	3.43	1.23	0.61	14.43
1997	1.29	1.70	0.48	1.50	3.01	1.23	0.79	1.76	0.89	1.04	0.02a	0.82	14.53
1998	1.08	0.91a	0.83	0.75	0.54	3.54	1.24	1.00	0.97	6.44	0.74b	0.08	18.12
MEAN	0.61	0.66	1.05	1.65	2.22	1.35	1.06	0.91	0.82	1.27	0.74	0.58	13.14
S.D.	0.33	0.37	0.77	1.25	1.77	0.99	0.66	0.61	0.61	1.25	0.39	0.46	2.84
No. YRS	33	33	33	33	34	34	34	34	34	34	33	33	32

Table 6
PINEDALE, WYOMING
Monthly Total Precipitation (inches)
(487260)

a = 1 day missing, b = 2 days missing, c = 3 days, ..etc.,

z = 26 or more days missing, A = Accumulations present

Long-term means based on columns; thus, the monthly row may not sum (or average) to the long-term annual value.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF MISSING DAYS : 5

Individual Months not used for annual or monthly statistics if more than 5 days are missing.

Individual Years not used for annual statistics if any month in that year has more than 5 days missing.

YEAR(S)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	ANN
1997	0.62	0.17	0.35	0.62	0.76	1.96	0.42	1.91	1.98	0.61	0.22	0.19	9.81
1998	0.98	0.48	1.29	0.59	2.02	3.93	2.59	0.78	0.96	1.02	0.29	0.50b	15.43
1999	0.68	0.68b	0.00z	2.37a	0.00z	0.00z	0.00z	0.00z	0.00z	0.00z	0.00z	0.00z	3.73
MEAN	0.64	0.51	0.63	0.87	1.62	1.25	1.02	1.02	1.10	0.77	0.71	0.65	11.26
S.D.	0.44	0.32	0.41	0.54	0.97	0.94	0.69	0.62	0.71	0.63	0.46	0.50	3.13
No. YRS	49	48	49	49	48	51	53	52	52	49	47	47	37

Table 7
BIG PINEY, WYOMING
Monthly Total Precipitation (inches)
(480695)

a = 1 day missing, b = 2 days missing, c = 3 days, ..etc.,

z = 26 or more days missing, A = Accumulations present

Long-term means based on columns; thus, the monthly row may not sum (or average) to the long-term annual value.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF MISSING DAYS : 5

Individual Months not used for annual or monthly statistics if more than 5 days are missing.

Individual Years not used for annual statistics if any month in that year has more than 5 days missing.

YEAR(S)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	ANN
1997	0.56	0.08	0.14	0.20	0.07	1.03	1.26	3.82	1.24	0.53	0.21	0.35	9.49
1998	0.46	0.44	1.09	0.63	1.32	2.41	0.98	0.99	0.49	1.28	0.17	0.03	10.29
1999	0.28	0.52	0.00z	0.00z	0.82	0.86a	0.44	0.67	1.21	0.03	0.00a	0.01f	4.83
MEAN	0.37	0.31	0.44	0.65	1.05	0.92	0.74	0.81	0.84	0.55	0.38	0.39	8.15
S.D.	0.29	0.27	0.33	0.51	0.84	0.79	0.44	0.75	0.70	0.58	0.30	0.34	2.07
No. YRS	45	43	44	46	46	45	43	46	48	47	45	42	29

Table 8
KEMMERER WTR TRTMT, WYOMING
Monthly Total Precipitation (inches)
(485105)

*** Note *** Provisional Data *** After Year/Month 200210

a = 1 day missing, b = 2 days missing, c = 3 days, ..etc.,

z = 26 or more days missing, A = Accumulations present

Long-term means based on columns; thus, the monthly row may not sum (or average) to the long-term annual value.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF MISSING DAYS : 5

Individual Months not used for annual or monthly statistics if more than 5 days are missing.

Individual Years not used for annual statistics if any month in that year has more than 5 days missing.

YEAR(S)	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	ANN
2000	0.04	0.00	0.00a	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.51	0.80	1.22	0.00z	0.00z	0.00b	2.57
2001	0.00	0.16a	0.00	0.40	0.89	0.30	0.97	0.25	0.69	0.40	0.40	0.60	5.06
2002	0.79	0.00	0.37	0.00z	0.42	0.01	0.21	0.04	0.38	1.12	0.00z	0.00z	3.34
MEAN	0.75	0.59	0.65	0.82	1.17	1.11	0.74	0.87	0.99	0.77	0.82	0.71	10.26
S.D.	0.43	0.53	0.47	0.63	0.72	1.05	0.55	0.79	0.95	0.61	0.66	0.62	3.55
No. YRS	52	52	53	50	53	50	52	52	50	50	52	52	39

EXHIBIT D



JANUARY 2006

WILDLIFE & ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Pronghorn of the Upper Green River Basin - Year 1 Summary

By Joel Berger, Kim Murray Berger, Jon P. Beckmann

Project Funding by Shell Exploration and Production Company, Ultra Petroleum, Anschutz Petroleum,
and
The Wildlife Conservation Society

The Wildlife Conservation Society

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is dedicated to saving wildlife and wildlands to assure a future for threatened species like elephants, tigers, sharks, macaws, or lynx. That mission is achieved through a conservation program that protects some 50 living landscapes around the world, manages more than 300 field projects in 53 countries, and supports the nation's largest system of living institutions – the Bronx Zoo, the New York Aquarium, the Wildlife Centers in Central Park, Queens, and Prospect Park, and the Wildlife Survival Center on St. Catherines Island, Georgia. We are developing and maintaining pioneering environmental education programs that reach more than three million people in the New York metropolitan area as well as in all 50 United States and 14 other countries. We are working to make future generations inheritors, not just survivors.

To learn more about WCS visit www.wcs.org.

WCS has been an active force in North American conservation since 1895. Bison reintroduction, legislation to protect endangered wildlife, and the establishment of more than twenty parks and reserves were early WCS accomplishments. Pioneering studies of bighorn sheep, elk, cougars, and wolves all benefited from WCS support. Today the WCS North America Program takes a science-based approach to conservation in more than forty projects in twenty-one states and provinces. Key issues include reserve creation, wildlife monitoring and recovery, ecosystem restoration, integrated landscape management, and community-based conservation.

To contact the North American Program write to: nap@wcs.org.

January 2006

Wildlife and Energy Development

Pronghorn of the Upper Green River Basin – Year 1 Summary

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